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Fighting U.S. privatization

Teachers strike in Puerto Rico

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

A broad struggle against the privatization of Puerto Rico's public education began March 19 with a teachers' strike as the Legislative Assembly tries to approve what it calls "educational reform."

The strike was called by the Front to Defend Public Education, which encompasses several labor union groups. Besides teachers' organizations, such as UNETE, Educamos, the Federation of PR Teachers and Puerto Rican Educators in Action, it includes the National Organization of Directors of Schools and the Organization of Directors and Administrators. Other unions such as UTIER, representing the energy sector, as well as several progressive organizations, parents and students have joined the call.

The popular support has been taken note of in radio and television coverage as well as in social media.

This call to action comes at a crucial time for Puerto Rico. Six months after hurricanes Irma and Maria and just three months before the new hurricane season begins, the devastation caused by the storms has not been resolved.

Thousands are still without electricity. Catastrophic unemployment, homelessnes and major health problems persist, including an increase in suicides and depression. The "recovery" work of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is ineffective and borders on criminal.

Colonialism stifles true government

Colonialism prevents a country from being able to set up a government responsive to the interests of its people. Every four years in Puerto Rico, a legislative farce takes place in which elite rulers are elected who continue the subjugation of the people for the benefit of U.S. interests, perpetuating colonialism and dependence.

The present government is trying desperately — even comically — to force through Puerto Rico's annexation by the U.S., the so-called Tennessee Plan. It wants to artificially transform the archipelago into what would appear to be a state of the union. In reality, not only does the Fiscal Control Board govern, but the government of Ricky Roselló hires all consulting firms, "experts" and agencies from the U.S. to impose their criteria on the Puerto Rican people.

The deepening misery and suffering of the people are totally ignored while million-dollar contracts are distributed right and left.

In addition, this "bankrupt" country is paying extravagant salaries to the president of the Fiscal Control Board, Natalie Jaresko ($625,000), who is Ukrainian; Héctor Pesquera, head of the new "National Security" agency and formerly an oppressor with the FBI

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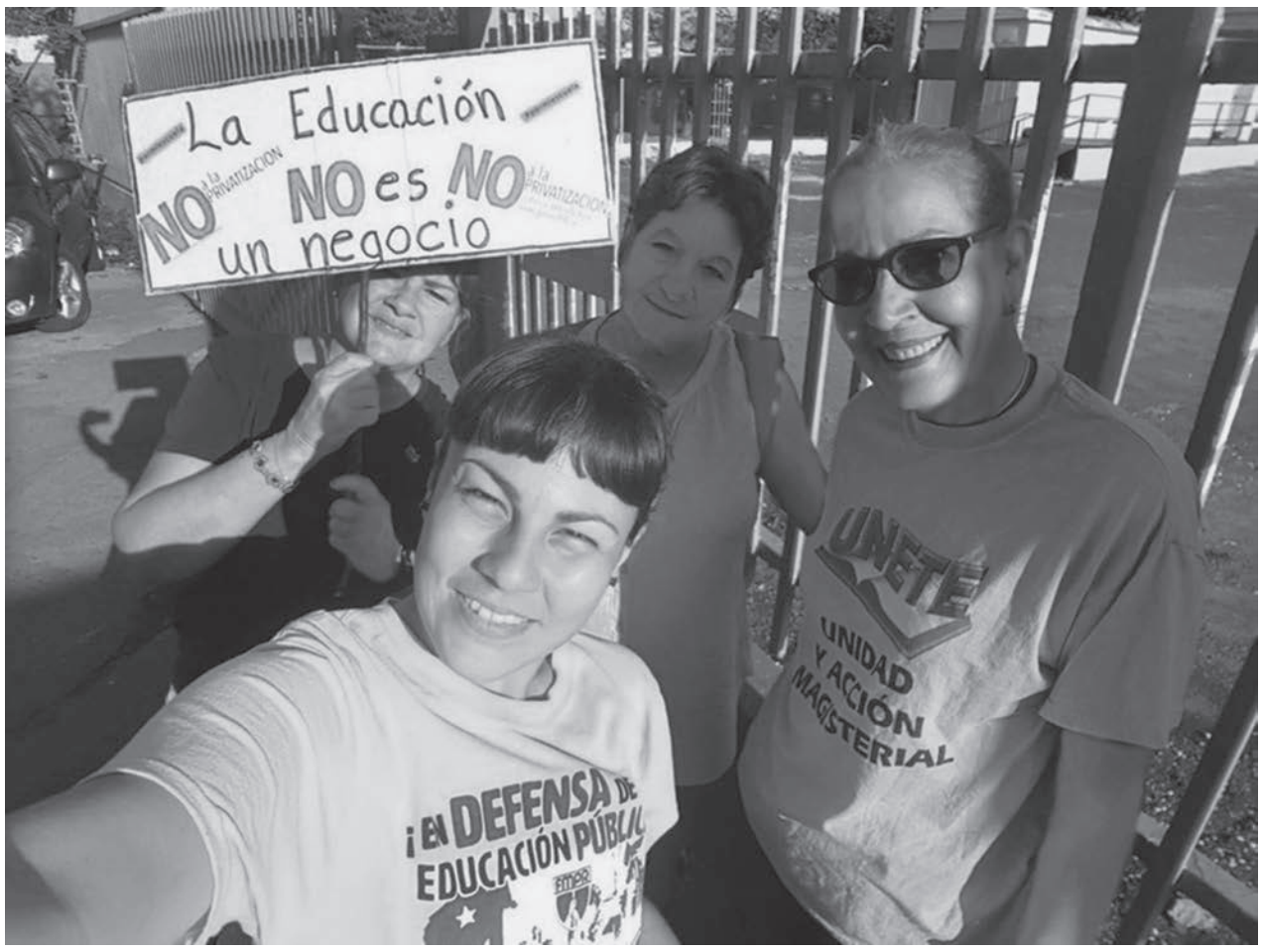

PHOTO: TEACHERS FEDERATION OF PUERTO RICO (FMPR)

Teachers in San Juan, Puerto Rico, strike to say 'Education is not a business.'

To the students marching on March 24

You want a very simple thing, as basic as ABC: to be able to go to school without being gunned down.

How did things get to such a horrible state that this should even be an issue?

Don't get demoralized when the politicians debate this to death. Just by coming out today and marching, you have taken a giant step forward.

You are coming together and doing something about the problem, not just shrinking into yourselves out of sorrow and shock.

You are embracing one another and coming up with ideas, plans, actions to shout out in one voice.

You are creating a MOVEMENT. And by doing that, you are already changing the political landscape.

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WW COMMENTARY

Big guns destroy U.S. schools

By Sara Flounders

Bigger guns are destroying children's lives in U.S. schools than the AR-15 used in the heinous Florida school murders.

Schools across the country are facing untenable choices of what programs to slash and how many teachers to cut, with an impact that puts millions of young lives and futures at risk.

These cuts in essential programs are because each year the U.S. military budget is relentlessly increased by 10 percent. Some of this increase is hidden in cost overruns and military "supplements" for ongoing wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

In order to "balance the federal budget," annual 5 percent cuts are ordered, on average, to "discretionary spending" in federal agencies and also to state and city programs.

Federal funding makes up an average of 31 percent of state budgets in 2018. Even where local tax increases or bonds attempt to fill the budget gap, this increased revenue is not enough to make up for cuts in state funding, due to federal cuts.

On a national level, state education funding per student is lower in 2018 than in 2008. Education workers' job benefits such as health care premiums and pensions are cut, or increased costs are demanded from these already underpaid city and state workers.

But worse cuts are on the way.

Trump's 2018 budget plans to increase military spending by $54 billion and cut nonmilitary programs by the same amount. The latest budget will dismantle numerous programs in health care, nutrition, affordable housing, the environment, science, the few remaining poverty programs, transportation and infrastructure projects that will affect the quality of life of millions upon millions of working and oppressed people.

Children's education and health programs face the deepest cuts.

U.S. military expenditures are already larger than that of the rest of the world combined, and U.S. weapons could incinerate the world many times over. To continue to expand this military, there is no essential program that the U.S. capitalist class is not willing to loot and destroy.

In order to justify this enormous theft of the peoples' resources, the U.S. ruling class must create endless political crisis and military confrontations on an ever-more-dangerous scale. The resulting militarism permeates society with the poison of both random and calculated violence.

Meanwhile, profits are constantly increasing to the military corporations, private contractors, secret spy agencies, cyber warfare units and maintenance of more than 1,000 foreign military bases. Billions that could go to education are poured into research and development of new weapons systems.

Local police forces are armed with U.S. military equipment and tanks, and their training is coordinated with the military. This gives the cops, the local repressive arm of capitalist society, far more leverage in its ongoing war on communities of color throughout the U.S. These are the same cops patrolling the hallways of public schools, which have been turned into school-to-prison pipelines.

End gun violence in the schools!

Money for education, not for war and militarization!

Flounders is a co-coordinator of the International Action Center, a leading anti-war and anti-imperialist organization based in the U.S. (iacenter.org)

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WAR WITHOUT VICTORY

by Sara Flounders

"By revealing the underbelly of the empire, Flounders sheds insight on how to stand up to the imperialist war machine and, in so doing, save ourselves and humanity."

– Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President, U.N. General Assembly, 2008-2009; Foreign Minister of Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

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WORKERS WORLD

Join us in the fight for socialism!

Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it's the only way forward!

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the never-ending quest for ever-greater profits. Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, joblessness and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, education or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black and Brown youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

WWP fights for socialism because the working class produces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in their hands, not be stolen in the form of capitalist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

Since 1959, Workers World Party has been out in the streets defending the workers and oppressed here and worldwide. If you're interested in Marxism, socialism and fighting for a socialist future, please contact a WWP branch near you. □

Contact a Workers World Party branch near you: **workers.org/wwp**

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Interview with Amazon worker

‘We feel extremely exploited’

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos has an obscene individual net worth of over $124 billion. Yet, the company's half-million-plus workers worldwide are struggling to survive economically while being pushed to their physical limits to maximize productivity at Amazon's "fulfillment centers." Comrade James Costello was hired at the Indianapolis warehouse in October, just before the high-pressure peak season began on "Black Friday." Amazon has five warehouses in Indiana, each employing around 2,000 workers. Amazon is now the 15th largest employer in the state. This is part 1 of Costello's recent conversation with WW labor reporter Martha Grevatt about working for Amazon.

Martha Grevatt: Tell us about the working conditions.

James Costello: With a full shift, however many packages come in, we're expected to push out at least around 20,000 packages, sometimes higher, sometimes lower. It can get unsafe when we have 30,000 or more packages because the other part of the job is loading them into vehicles, and it's hard to get them all pushed out. Packages get stacked up so people end up tripping. People try to lift heavier packages by themselves and get sprains and other injuries, including to their back. Small injuries like that are not covered by Amazon. You can go home, but it's an unexcused absence. If you are severely injured, insurance will cover it, but only if it can be proven that the injury took place during working hours. At the Plainfield, Ind., facility someone was killed during peak season last year. They got killed by a lift. They were pulling packages, and the lift came down while they were at the bottom underneath it. This demonstrates both a lack of proper safety training and a lack of equipment maintenance.

MG: Is there a high rate of injuries? How are injured workers treated?

JC: There are a lot of injuries but many go unreported. It's really an issue for the older people working there, just the physical requirements and the injuries. People work injured because they can't afford to take the time off to get better. Then the burden is on you to prove you actually got injured at the workplace. If you can't prove that, Amazon won't help you.

MG: How many hours are you required to work each day and each week?

JC: Right now I work full time, seven to eight hours a day, five days a week. However, if there's a large load coming in, those hours can be extended or hours can be shortened on a slow day.

MG: What kind of breaks do you get?

JC: There's one 15-minute break if you work under eight hours. If you work more hours, there can be an optional unpaid 30-minute break for lunch.

MG: Is this adequate?

JC: I don't feel it's adequate, personally. When you're standing the entire day and running all over the place, 15 minutes isn't enough. If there's a lot of packages, they will start the break but then expect you to be back at the line after the 15 minutes is up. So going to and from the break area is included in the 15 minutes.

MG: So you are on your feet half your break?

JC: If you work far from the break area, yeah.

MG: Do workers have issues with being able to use the restroom?

JC: Yes. You are pushed to make these quotas, and if you use the bathroom, they see you as not being "productive." I was told by a co-worker who has worked at multiple locations that they got written up for using the restroom because it meant they were under the quota. So you have to go without using the restroom.

MG: There has been a lot in the media about Amazon's tracking of workers and workplace surveillance. Can you talk about this and what kind of working atmosphere it creates?

JC: For whatever aspect you are working in — fulfillment-picking, packaging or distribution — each category has its own labor tracking process. Fulfillment is Amazon's term for the process of picking (locating bought item in inventory and going through the pick process) and packaging item, sorting, loading and then sending item outside the facility. These are the steps to get the item from inventory to delivery. You have a mobile computer device where you scan a product that goes into the system, and you have to meet a quota per hour on packages pushed through. Going under quota can lead to being sent home early or possible termination if it recurs multiple times.

The other aspect of that question is the atmosphere. The workers are really put up against management to a point that the workers feel extremely exploited. When they get a drink of water or go to the bathroom, they know they're being watched constantly. This creates an atmosphere of uneasiness. Even talking can create problems because workers are focused on "I gotta be more productive." □

‘Time’s Up Wendy’s March’

By Anne Pruden
New York

WW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN

Farmworkers and their allies completed a five-day "Freedom Fast" organized by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, on March 15 at the United Nations' Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. This followed a march of hundreds of protesters in a five-block-long "Time's Up Wendy's March." The demonstration began at the U.N. building and passed by the New York offices of Wendy's board chairperson and largest shareholder Nelson Peltz.

Demonstrators chanted "Boycott Wendy's!" and "Down, down exploitation! Up, up fair food nation!" Supporters came from as far away as Tennessee, Texas and California to show solidarity with the farmworkers.

For five days, the hunger strikers and their supporters camped and rallied outside billionaire Peltz's Park Avenue hedge fund offices of Trian Partners. A prominent colorful banner read, "We fast because Nelson Peltz won't use his power to end sexual violence against farmworker women." Some 103,000 petition signatures were gathered supporting the fast and Wendy's boycott. Although Peltz's office accepted only a fraction of the petitions, fasters celebrated, saying this showed the farmworkers' strength and the company's weakness.

Those fasting and their allies demanded that Wendy's join the Fair Food Program, set up by the CIW in 2011 in Florida. This established groundbreaking worker protections, including more humane working conditions and fairer wages. Significantly, it includes a no-tolerance policy on sexual harassment and abuse faced by tens of thousands of women immigrants in the tomato fields.

Unlike McDonald's, Burger King and other fast food giants, Wendy's owners and top officials refuse to join the program. Protesters denounced ongoing wage theft, child labor and other human rights abuses and sexual violence faced by workers in Mexico's produce industry. Wendy's currently buys its tomatoes there to avoid having to join the Fair Food Program, recognize workers' rights and stop abuse of women in the fields.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers website provides background on this important struggle and its Fair Food Program, as well as daily coverage of the Freedom Fast.

Kathy Durkin contributed to this article.

A ‘Defiant Workers’ Spring’

WW PHOTO

By Otis Grotewohl

The class war is still stirring in West Virginia since the conclusion of the courageous, nine-day education workers' strike. Some 1,400 members of Communication Workers Local 142 walked out statewide against Frontier Communications on March 4. They were joined by their sisters and brothers in Ashburn, Va.

Members of Workers World Party visited CWA picket lines while also showing solidarity with the teachers and school support staff waging battle against capitalist government officials.

One CWA striker told Workers World, "This fight was a long time coming, but there is no denying the school workers inspired us. We have been trying to negotiate a decent contract since August, but we have had two extensions and the company wants to lay off 200 workers."

Picketers pointed out that when Frontier bought out Verizon in 2010, there were 2,100 positions; today there are only 1,400 employees. The strikers described automation and the contracting out to non-union work as the reason for job losses.

Frontier uses modern day ‘gun thugs’

Frontier bosses filed for an injunction against the strike on March 15. A Kanawha County Circuit Court judge approved a temporary restraining order limiting picket lines to six strikers on March 16. The bosses have falsely charged the strikers with "unlawful unrest" and "abuse."

But it is the company that is being violently abusive toward the picketers.

Frontier is contracting a scab outfit known as "Mercury Z" to despicably cross the picket lines and do installation and repair work during the strike. One scab pulled a gun on a picket line in Flatwoods.

If that is not shameful enough, the company has actually hired Securitas and Pinkerton Consulting & Investigations as armed rent-a-cops to escort the scabs. The Pinkerton agency has a bloody history of being murderous paramilitary guards used against heroic workers' struggles since 1859.

Historically referred to as "gun thugs" and "goon squads," Pinkerton agents were most famous for their violent behavior during the 1892 Homestead Strike. They were also used against many railroad and coal miner strikes. They have a reputation of harassment and intimidation, even infiltrating unions to disrupt and destroy organizing campaigns.

Despite the company's use of the courts and Pinkerton thugs, the CWA strikers are standing strong in West Virginia, where the education workers' strike also encouraged teachers to strike in Jersey City, N.J. Education employees may soon strike in Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona. It's starting to look like a defiant workers' spring! □

Miami bridge collapse

Did builder put profits before safety?

By G. Dunkel

A pedestrian bridge under construction over a seven-lane highway leading to Florida International University collapsed March 15, killing six people and injuring 10 in a mass of crushed cars, steel and concrete.

The 950-ton span was being built under a new construction protocol called "Accelerated Bridge Construction." Its intent is to speed up construction and reduce traffic interruptions by building bridges off-site, in this case by the side of the road running past FIU, and then rotating them into place. This last step occurred March 10 during a six-hour period.

According to the university's website, the bridge was designed to weather a Category-5 hurricane and last 100 years.

A March 10 press release celebrated the bridge's completion.

Atorod Azizinamini, chair of FIU's Civil and Environmental Engineering Department and director of its Accelerated Bridge Construction University Transportation Center, stated: "This project is an outstanding example of the ABC method. Building the major element of the bridge — its main span superstructure — outside of the traveled way and away from busy Eighth Street is a milestone."

The Federal Highway Administration lauds ABC technology as a "timely innovation," especially when "approximately 25 percent of our nation's aging bridges need repair or replacement and our highways are already congested without the added strain of road closures." (fhwa.dot.gov/bridge)

Given the pressing need to replace hundreds of bridges and other decaying infrastructure in the U.S., there is tremendous interest in ABC, which has been widely used in Europe. Not only does it save time and avoid rerouting traffic during construction, but it saves big bucks.

Safety first?

Like anything else, however, ABC bridge construction methods must be used carefully and to precise specifications, with consideration of safety put ahead of convenience and saving money.

The reasons for the collapse of the FIU bridge are probably going to take a long time to discover and likely involve multiple factors. Both Architecture News and the NBC affiliate in Miami have pointed out three serious errors known so far.

A meeting held by the engineering firm Figg Bridge Engineers with representatives from FIU and the Florida Department of Transportation accepted Figg's assertion that cracks appearing in the bridge "did not compromise the structural integrity of the bridge," even though Figg did not explain why the cracks appeared.

Work on tightening some internal cables in the bridge that had loosened, as well as a "dangerous" stress test, went on while traffic was allowed to flow under the bridge.

No temporary support structures were in place under the bridge, which would have helped prevent an abrupt failure like the one that occurred. But they would have cost money and interfered with traffic while being installed and removed.

"Innovations take a design firm into an area where they don't have applicable experience, and then we have another unexpected failure on our hands," said Robert Bea, an engineering and construction management professor at the University of California, Berkeley, after reviewing the bridge's design and photos of the collapse. (canada.constructconnect.com, March 16)

In this era of deregulation, cutbacks and austerity, saving time and money might seem a worthwhile objective, but not when it comes to the safety and lives of pedestrians, drivers and workers. □

Justice for Siham Byah!

By Sam Ordóñez
Boston

Siham Byah, a recently deported activist and mother from Boston, gave a press conference from Rabat, Morocco, on March 1. She described her case and presented her demands to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.

While at a routine check-in with immigration services in November 2017, Byah was detained. The DCF took her 8-year-old son, Naseem, into custody, despite Byah's wishes that her partner care for him. The two have still not been reunited. Among Byah's demands were a clear plan for reunification with her son, mental health support for him and an investigation into the irregularities in her case.

At the press conference, Byah stated, "It is my belief, as well as that of my attorney, and all involved, that my extradition was nothing more than a low blow agreement between the Moroccan and American governments as a retaliation for my political opinions and actions."

An outspoken activist in Boston, Byah has been involved with the February 20 movement/USA chapter since 2011. This movement arose in Morocco that year during what is known as the "Arab Spring." Her deportation is part of a larger racist campaign of terror by ICE and the Trump administration targeting migrant activists.

In January, ICE detained New York activist Ravi Ragbir, although a massive outpouring of community support won his freedom. More recently, Latinx organizer Alejandra Pablos was detained in Arizona. As with Byah, ICE detained these two activists during routine check-ins. Other deported or detained activists include Jean Montrevil in New York; Daniela Vargas, a "Dreamer," who was picked up moments after speaking about her experience in Jackson, Miss.; and Maru Mora-Villalpando in Seattle.

As the Trump administration continues its vicious attacks on immigrant communities — including terminating temporary protected status for Haitian, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan and Sudanese immigrants and attacking Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — it is no surprise that outspoken community leaders and activists are among its first targets.

ICE's anti-immigrant campaign is also an assault on the union movement, aimed at decimating the most militant ranks of organized labor. Much union organizing in recent years has been carried out in employment sectors where jobs are held predominantly by immigrant workers. Increasingly, union locals have struggle-oriented immigrant majorities.

It is urgent that all progressive people ally themselves with unions, unorganized TPS workers and activists from immigrant communities who are fighting for permanent status for DACA Dreamers, and all undocumented people targeted by Washington's inhumane, racist attacks. □

'Columbus is guilty!' say Black Pride 4 in Ohio

By Workers World Indianapolis bureau

A large multinational crowd gathered on March 12 in front of the Columbus, Ohio, City Hall in solidarity with the Black Pride 4. The event, organized under the leadership of Black Queer and Intersectional Columbus, raised the demand to Free the Black Pride 4, who had been arrested at Stonewall Columbus Pride in June 2017. The demonstration featured speakers from BQIC, Get Equal, People's Justice Project and International Socialist Organization. Members of Workers World Party attended the event in solidarity.

The Black Pride 4 had been assaulted and arrested for briefly disrupting Stonewall Columbus Pride in order to protest systemic racist police violence and violence against trans people of color. Stonewall Columbus organizers had consistently refused to create space for Black trans and queer voices. They also refused to listen to safety concerns of queer, trans and intersex people of color (QTIPOC) as they worked with Columbus police to carry out their event. Stonewall Columbus organizers continued to work alongside the state by testifying against the Black Pride 4 in court.

Sentencing of three of the Freedom Fighters took place on March 13. Wriply was ordered to perform 80 hours of community service and given two years probation. Ashley got a $200 fine plus court costs, 60 hours community service and two years probation. Kendall got a $50 fine plus court costs, with 48 hours community service and two years probation.

The fact that none of the three will serve jail time is a partial victory. The struggle continues as Deandre, who faces felony charges, has yet to go to court.

Columbus Community Pride is now being organized for 2018 in order to highlight voices of QTIPOC and take the police out of Pride. The event description also states it will be free of the capitalistic influence of corporate sponsorships seen at Stonewall Columbus Pride events. For more, go to columbuscommunitypride.org/.

One may find other ways to assist the Black Pride 4 at tinyurl.com/ybp8d2az

WW PHOTO: REECE EVANS

Rally for Black Pride 4 finds both Christopher Columbus and the city of Columbus "Guilty!"

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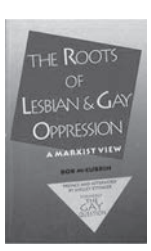

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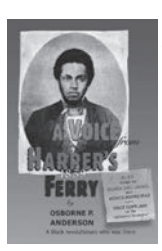

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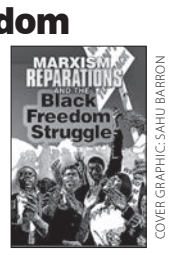


COVER GRAPHIC: SAHU BARRON

A million students walk out for safe schools

By Jayla Rae
Raleigh, N.C.

PHOTOS: THE MYCENAEAN

Students walk out as part of a national gun violence protest, March 14, Leesville Road High School, Raleigh, N.C.

A million students, from all ages and backgrounds, marched out of schools on March 14 in solidarity with the 17 victims of the mass school shooting in Parkland, Fla., on Feb. 15. They chanted: "When our students are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!"

The student-led walkout was called by youth activists in Parkland, who requested solidarity actions from students and allies all across the U.S., to demand an end to violence in schools. The Parkland activists' request was simple: That everyone walk out of classes at 10 a.m., be outside for 17 minutes to honor and uplift the 17 lives lost, and demand that all schools become a safe space for all students and teachers.

This writer was an active organizer, with a small group of other students, in forming a walkout at our school, Leesville Road High School in Raleigh, N.C. During second period on March 14, we gathered in the main lobby of our school with a banner that read, "Make Our Schools Safe #endtheviolence," and a bullhorn.

Soon hundreds of students — Black, white, Latinx, Muslim — along with teachers, filled the halls, ready to march out of the school. Many were wearing orange, used to signify opposition to gun violence since 2013, after the death of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old African-American student in Chicago.

Students held signs that read, "Stop the violence" and "No more silence." After a march to the football field, students of color leading the way, a brief program began, with two seniors taking the bullhorn and making space for participants' thoughts as students and as women of color.

One 18-year-old student, Alia Hassan, said: "We stand in solidarity with Stoneman Douglas, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, University of Texas, Columbine, Red Lake. ... The list goes on. This is the eleventh week of 2018, and we are 14 school shootings in. We are making the change, when our lawmakers have been oblivious to our safety." She then uplifted the names of the 17 victims from the Parkland shooting, 14 of them students and three teachers, and called for a moment of silence.

Another student said she and her friends participated in the walkout because "it's our duty to make change in our society today."

To some students, a safe school means stricter gun control laws or outlawing the AR-15, a weapon most commonly used during mass school shootings.

But to most students, safe schools mean more than gun control.

Safe schools means arming our teachers, not with guns, but with better pay and more resources for the classroom. Safe schools means kicking police "resource officers" out of the schools and ending the harassment and criminalization of Black and Brown students. Safe schools means having all-gender restrooms for queer, trans and gender nonconforming students; and destroying the racist, sexist dress code that most schools have. Safe schools mean having more counselors and dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline.

The fight for safety in schools does not end with the March 14 walkout. Students are demanding that lawmakers and adult allies start listening and taking action to make schools safe.

On March 24, people from all over the country will be traveling to Washington, D.C., to participate in the "March for Our Lives" rally against gun violence. Organizers are asking for solidarity marches in different parts of the world. They are dedicating this moment to student-led activism, and will take to the streets to demand that safety become a priority. ☐

To the students marching on March 24

Continued from page 1

Your diversity is your great strength. At a time when people of color, migrants, women, the LGBTQ community and vastly underpaid workers are being attacked by the billionaire president and his cronies, trying to pit us against each other, you are affirming the concept of SOLIDARITY.

Your love of life and each other gives you the strength to push back against all who are trying to pull you down.

Why are these terrible things happening in our schools?

We live in dangerous times — the crumbling of an empire, really. An empire built from the beginning on stolen Native land and enslaved African people. The current $700 billion military budget is meant to shore up this dying empire. A huge promotion of police violence saturates our culture. This sends the message that guns and bombs will fix everything.

Armed white supremacists and Nazis parade openly, and the billionaire president won't condemn them. All this feeds into racist, anti-women, anti-gay fantasies acted upon by young men like Dylann Roof and Nikolas Cruz.

This is not an issue of love versus hate. We can do both. We can love one another and hate all that is meant to divide us. We can love music and kindness and kidding around, and hate exploitation and bigotry. Che Guevara famously said: "The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love." He also fought to make a socialist revolution.

The very future of the world that will be yours, from the polar ice caps to the rising seas, is threatened by the chaotic, profit-driven system of capitalism.

At such a time, can we afford to be less than revolutionaries? Think long about it, dear courageous young people, as you join the struggle to fix the horrible mess this system has made of the world. ☐

Mass movement marches against Trans Mountain pipeline

By Jim McMahan
Vancouver, Canada

Over 10,000 people marched on March 11 in the city of Burnaby, near Vancouver, B.C., Canada, opposing the $7.3 billion Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline. First Nations, whose people would be most directly affected by this massive pipeline carrying bitumen oil from Alberta tar sands, led the rally. This is the largest fightback since the First Nations movement fought the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock, N.D.

The inlet at Burnaby is where the 700-mile pipeline will come to the shore and the oil will be loaded on tankers. Rueben George and other Native activists and elders from across Canada spoke at the rally. George represents the local Tsleil-Waututh First Nation, which is directly in the path of the pipeline.

Rally speakers protested Kinder Morgan's invasion of their community. They also spoke against oil spills, species extinction and global warming.

Indigenous women have launched the Tiny House Warrior movement, with plans to build houses in the path of the pipeline. The rally was held in a clearing next to where the finished pipeline would come through, which is on unceded First Nations land.

Throughout the day, volunteers worked on an 18-by-21-foot "Watch House" directly in the pipeline's path, only a short distance from the rally.

The Kinder Morgan pipeline will increase an old, smaller pipeline's capacity from 300,000 barrels a day to 890,000. It will increase traffic in the Salish Sea from five to 34 tankers a month. It is inevitable that an oil tanker accident will occur, and overwhelm and destroy the ecology of the Salish Sea. That body of water includes the straits of British Columbia, between Vancouver city and Vancouver Island, and the Puget Sound in Washington state.

The Justin Trudeau federal government is promoting the pipeline, but the provincial and local governments oppose it.

Burnaby, B.C., Canada, March 11.

The Protect the Inlet campaign includes First Nations on both sides of the Canadian-U.S. border, along with many community and environmental groups, with thousands of people pledged to commit civil disobedience to stop the pipeline.

The struggle has intensified since the March 11 rally. Kinder Morgan gained a court injunction to prevent demonstrators from coming near the Kinder Morgan terminal. On March 17, 28 demonstrators were arrested. ☐

With support of Workers Assembly

Custodians win big in Durham, N.C.

By Dante Strobino
Durham, N.C.

Custodians in Durham Public Schools won $1.1 million in wages and benefit increases on March 8 after a month-long fight. Workers had been complaining about going years without any pay increase. Many have only part-time jobs with no benefits.

After powerful testimony directly from workers, the DPS Board of Education voted to "in-source" the custodians back to direct DPS control and move away from a private contractor to clean the schools.

The deal covers all the district's 294 full-time and part-time custodians who work for either Service Solutions or their subcontractor, Premiere.

The new decision will bring full-time workers up to potentially $16 per hour; move from a 401K retirement plan to a Defined Benefit Pension plan; and decrease monthly health care costs from $121 to $25 per month for individuals.

Part-time workers will see the largest wage increases. They will gain at least $3.22 per hour and paid sick days.

DPS contracted out the custodial services to Service Solutions 13 years ago in an effort to save the district money on the backs of the workers. This type of privatization is rampant across the U.S. in this period of dead-end capitalism and never-ending budget cuts.

An important aspect of this struggle was that it was rank-and-file Black workers, like Deborrah Bailey and many others, who led this fight and carried it forward to the finish. They had been organizing for months, including participating in direct meetings with DPS decision makers.

Bailey said of their organizing strategy: "We won because we had the gumption to go to the decision makers. We knew what we wanted — to be in-house. We can't send in lawyers to represent us. It was the workers that were the worker bees that made this change possible. The beauty of it was that we had over 80 workers involved and speaking up, and we corroborated each other."

The workers organized a meeting where over 65 custodians showed up to speak to senior DPS administrators about the need to in-source the jobs. These same workers also showed up at the Durham Workers Assembly on March 1 to speak about their conditions and appeal for help. The DWA helped mobilize community and labor support at the March 8 school board meeting.

The Durham Association of Educators, an affiliate of the National Education Association, played a very helpful role in communicating the workers' demands directly to school board members and ensuring workers were on an official committee to resolve the concerns.

Defeating 'divide-and-conquer' tactics

Just two years ago in late 2016, Service Solutions was contracting out the cleaning work to a subcontractor, Integrity Facilities Management, which declared bankruptcy and didn't pay its employees for a couple weeks of work during the year-end holiday season. Undocumented Latinx workers who were not paid were impacted the most. Those workers organized some protests and finally got back pay.

Now, the same company is pitting these undocumented Latinx workers against the Black workers. The bosses have convinced the undocumented Latinx workers that the county won't hire them directly. So the bosses coerced these workers to speak out in favor of the private company at the school board meeting, while a list of entirely Black workers challenged the company in favor of in-sourcing.

This struggle highlighted how the bosses use racism to attempt to divide and conquer the workers. But in the end, the workers overcame these racist attacks!

Building Durham Workers Assembly

Workers across Durham are continuing to organize through the Durham Workers Assembly to help build worker organizations to challenge employers. The assembly was launched by a core group of workers' organizations dedicated to organizing workers across Durham into unions and to "make Durham a union town."

WW PHOTO

Custodians pleased with outcome of strike.

There have been three public assemblies since the municipal elections last fall where workers from many different industries, including fast food, construction, domestic service, city and university employees, and many others, have raised demands on their bosses. They have crafted a program of action, called a "Workers Bill of Rights," to help establish standards for workplace safety, wages, benefits and union rights.

The assembly is also demanding that the city create a workers' commission, which will be composed of workers from major industries and employers across Durham, and give it resources to enforce fair working conditions and wages.

The assemblies have been important launching places to gather community and labor support behind labor struggles and to mobilize actions to shame employers.

The Durham Workers Assembly is hosting public worker speakouts and organizing meetings the first Thursday of every month, and will be joining with the Southern Workers Assembly to host a workers' school in the summer. □

Lessons of the West Virginia strike

PART 2

This is Part 2 of the article summarizing the lessons of the recent education workers' strike in West Virginia. For the full article, go to workers.org.

By Otis Grotewohl
Charleston, W.Va.

Before the strike, there had been some stress and tension between teachers and school service workers. But solidarity was constantly increased through the process of on-the-ground struggle, the conversations on the picket line, mass rallies in Charleston, and the #55United digital-age communication.

Education workers were quite clear that they were striking for all state workers. WW talked to one high school teacher who said: "We want to get 5 percent. And we want all the state employees to get the same. They can't strike and we can. We are striking for them too."

This teacher referenced the fact that workers employed directly by the state are subject to "no-strike" restrictions in West Virginia. But teachers, employed by their counties, have more due process if fired.

When the strike ended on March 5, the education workers were proud they had fought and won a 5 percent raise for all state employees. They clearly expect all state workers to receive that raise.

The workers also built solidarity with other unions and community groups. In parallel to the school workers' strike, about 1,400 Frontier workers, organized by the Communication Workers in West Virginia and Ashburn, Va., went out on March 4. When WWP organizers visited school picket lines across the state on March 6, school workers were getting news of a likely win — and were immediately packing up their extra food and supplies to take directly to CWA picket lines in their county. A Roanoke (Va.) Peoples' Power Network contingent drove to Charleston with their banner "Class Struggle in Session," raising cheers from the strikers.

CWA on Strike against Frontier Communications
SOLIDARITY With West Virginia Workers! #DefeatAusterity
CWA on Strike against Frontier Communications
SOLIDARITY With West
CWA

WW PHOTO

Mond Sankara and David Sole, from a WWP-Detroit delegation, holding solidarity signs, join CWA picket line at Frontier in Charleston, W.Va., March 5.

Widespread solidarity among students, community members, striking teachers and school workers was evident everywhere in the state. Students organized a separate march and rally in Charleston on March 2 to support their teachers. The teachers, well aware that many students would go hungry without school meals, put together systematic plans to feed their students when schools were closed. Teachers made sandwiches, packed meals, worked with churches and other community groups to get food delivered, and made it clear they were not "abandoning" students, as right-wingers accused.

Role of a communist party

In the 2016 election, every single one of West Virginia's 55 counties voted for Republican presidential candidate billionaire Trump, with his false promises to "save" workers and his solidarity-wrecking racist slurs. Trump got 70 percent of the state's vote.

In the 2018 West Virginia strike, workers overturned that vote. Education workers united as a multinational force and came out for their own class interests in every one of the 55 counties

Faced with the grim reality of their struggle for funding against the legislative dominance of Big Oil and Big Banks, the education workers rose up independent of existing political parties and took action for themselves and for all workers. This unity was forged despite the atomization of workers in the past decade, despite differences and contradictions between workers, despite anti-worker, racist propaganda spewed by the capitalist class.

When workers rise up in this way, the duty of a communist party is to support the workers in their struggle. We know that no matter how hard the contradictions, it is possible for workers to face those, unite through solidarity, rise up and forge new strengths to move forward. That is the potential for growth in the struggle.

Workers World Party was committed to that support during the West Virginia strike and had a presence there from the beginning. A WWP organizer on the ground visited workers on picket lines throughout the state, handing out informational leaflets and literature. One banner raised by WWP comrades was "Money for People's Needs, Make the Banks and Oil Companies Pay." That sentiment was strongly echoed by education workers who want Big Oil taxed at higher rates to pay for their underfunded health insurance.

On March 5, a delegation from Workers World Party-Detroit traveled to Charleston and joined in passing out thousands of union statements and resolutions in support of the strikers, including those from the Southern Workers Assembly and Steelworkers Local 8751, Boston School Bus Drivers.

Workers eagerly took hundreds of WW newspapers featuring front-page headlines and photos of their strike.

Banners, headlines, photos — even without reading the text, workers knew immediately: "WWP supports you." The party offered support to resist the capitalist ruling class and political parties, to resist racism and other bigotries, and to move forward in a more anti-capitalist, internationalist, socialist direction.

WWP-Detroit organizer Jerry Goldberg spoke on March 5 at the state Capitol in Charleston on the racist, predatory bank foreclosures in Detroit, the attacks on pensions, the school privatizations. He invited strikers to the National Conference to Defeat Austerity on March 24, saying: "We understand the attacks waged on all of us by the banks and the corporations. We stand with you. We have confidence in your victory. You are inspiring

Jersey City teachers face down injunction

By Sara Flounders
Jersey City, N.J.

Teachers here walked out on strike on Friday, March 16. Represented by the Jersey City Education Association, they refused to back down in the face of a court injunction that ordered them back to work. New Jersey state laws prohibit public sector unions from striking.

The teachers' assertion of their right to strike has now won a big labor victory, according to union leaders. Late on Sunday, March 18, the JCEA announced that an agreement had been confirmed with the Board of Education, pending approval by a teachers' vote to accept or reject the contract.

The union had spent the weekend making plans for picket lines in front of all 38 public schools, K through 12. Jersey City is the second-largest city in New Jersey by population (247,597) and is rich in racial, ethnic and language diversity. The overwhelming majority of the city is Black, Latinx, Asian and Arab. Its 30,000 public school students speak more than 40 different first languages.

A visit to the packed and bustling union hall confirmed an intense level of mobilization. Many other unions and community groups came to offer support and solidarity. Parents were arriving with bags of snacks and supplies for the strikers.

Friday's picket lines in front of each school were greeted by drivers honking support. Many high school students joined their teachers on the lines. School nurses, paraprofessionals, secretaries, child-study teams, guidance counselors and noncertified administrators whose contracts are up next for negotiation also joined the pickets.

From each school there was a Friday morning march to the Board of Education. There, while drums pounded, the speaker system blasted the Twisted Sister song, "We're Not Gonna Take It!" The teachers' strike decision had followed a raucous school board meeting, lasting past midnight Thursday, which ended without the board satisfying the teachers' demands.

Faced with the strike on Friday, mass demonstrations, marches and overwhelming community support, the board was forced to concede to a contract that met the teachers' demands, including agreement on salaries and health care costs.

Health care costs skyrocket

The burning issue across New Jersey and for many teachers in the U.S. is skyrocketing employee health care costs. Local teachers spoke of premiums as high as $1,400 a month, totaling $17,000 a year.

Due to health care costs increasing 15 percent in recent years, teachers were faced with take-home pay in 2017 totaling less than what teachers received 10 years ago.

The 4,000 teachers had worked without a contract since Sept. 1 as negotiations with the Board of Education ground on. The teachers last struck in 1998 when they also defied a court injunction and fines to stay out for five days. With unity and determination, they won an important victory 20 years ago. (tinyurl.com/yd2k3t9b)

Tax abatements for the rich

Jersey City's rate of poverty at 25 percent is now double the state average. The city is sharply divided between expensive and hip waterfront and downtown development and heavily taxed immigrant and working-class neighborhoods facing gentrification.

The city's claim of inability to meet the teachers' demands due to lack of funds and a $65 million deficit was challenged by the teachers' union. Jersey City offers tax abatements of 20 and 30 years to big real estate developers.

At a rally the day before the strike, JCEA president Ron Greco condemned Mayor Steven Fulop for his silence on teacher demands: "Nobody but developers get in to see him. Then he gives them abatements that do not pay any school taxes." Fulop campaigned recently for re-election as a liberal, pro-union Democrat.

The strike's success will have statewide implications, as unions across New Jersey struggle to cap employee health care costs.

The Jersey City strike was connected by teachers, many supporters and local media to growing national militancy by teachers and school workers, given the recent successful nine-day education workers' statewide strike in West Virginia.

The Puerto Rican Teachers Federation, EDUCAMOS and allied teachers' organizations in the Broad Front in Defense of Public Education (FADEP) have called a national teachers' work stoppage March 19 in response to neocolonial austerity imposed by U.S. and Spanish capitalists. Kentucky teachers are fighting to keep their pension plan from being gutted by austerity "reform." Arizona teachers have begun highly visible actions sporting "Red for Ed" T-shirts. Oklahoma teachers are set to strike April 2 in a state where oil and gas companies pay no property taxes on land holding their reserves. ☐

Students on picket line for striking teachers, Bluefield, W.Va., Feb. 26.

people all over the country. The struggle is spreading. Solidarity!" (Full comments at tinyurl.com/ybl782dp)

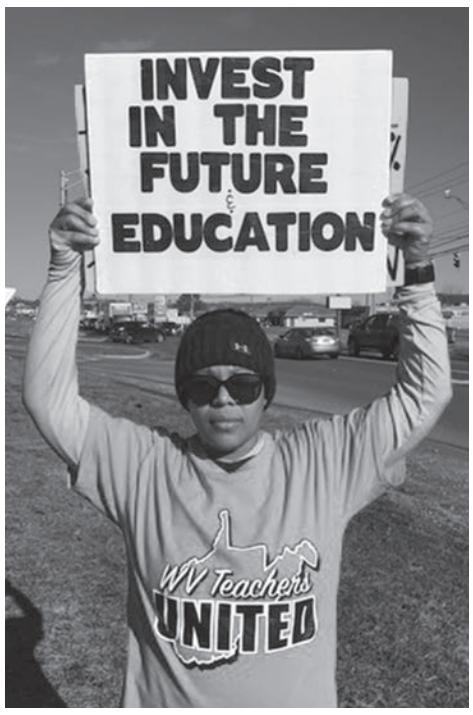
Militancy sparks militancy

The West Virginia strike has many lessons about the connections that must be made between the broadest workers' struggles and the fierce struggles by oppressed peoples against injustice — the fight against racism, immigrant-bashing, hatred of LGBTQ people and women, discrimination against people with disabilities.

At the Capitol rallies, thousands of multinational, but majority white, women chanted: "I believe that we will win!" a chant that rings out during Fight For $15 and Black Lives Matter marches. Never has it been more important for workers to fully live the old slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all," and to join with all workers across the bigoted divisions that bosses impose.

Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers and legendary for his role in the 1989-90 Pittston strike, rallied strikers to militancy on Feb. 26. He emphasized the civil disobedience tactics of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "We need to fight like Dr. King. I call on every union member in the state of West Virginia to stand with these workers. Workers who stand united will never be defeated."

Martha Grevatt also contributed to this article.



WW PHOTOS

Teacher on the picket line for students and community, Beckley, W.Va., Feb. 27.

University of Illinois U-C Graduate workers win new contract

By Kaitlyn Griffith
Chicago

After 12 days of striking, graduate workers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign overwhelmingly approved a new contract. The strike was the longest in University of Illinois history.

The strike began Feb. 26 after the administration refused to guarantee tuition waivers for workers.

Tuition waivers were initially secured in the first contract bargained by the Graduate Employees' Organization in 2009. Without them, many graduate workers would have to pay twice their stipends to cover the cost of enrollment.

Ten days of eight-hour picket lines forced the cancellation and relocation of dozens of classes. GEO received solidarity letters and support photos from workers and their local unions around the U.S. and internationally.

Members and supporters turned out in the hundreds to rallies on the campus quad, calling on the university administration to return to the bargaining table. Strike activities culminated in a 24-hour occupation of multiple buildings on campus.

Graduate workers rolled out sleeping bags and pitched tents on March 8 in the Swanlund Administration Building, which houses the chancellor's office, and the Henry Administration Building, which houses the university president's office. They brought food and water and promised not to leave until bargaining resumed.

Faced with a choice between returning to the bargaining table and forcibly ejecting graduate workers from their own campus buildings, university officials decided to reconvene with the GEO's bargaining committee on March 9. The occupation was suspended during negotiations.

The five-year contract was approved with 98 percent of the vote. It provides substantial gains for graduate workers. Tuition waivers are once again secured, as are pay increases. Health insurance coverage was expanded; ethnicity, immigration status, gender expression and arrest records were added as protected information; and the ability to grieve microaggressions as discrimination was introduced.

The UIUC GEO's Twitter and Facebook pages celebrated the victory, while maintaining a measured focus on what lies ahead for the organization, the importance of enforcing and improving their contract, and how graduate workers can win through unionizing their campuses.

A tweet from March 9 reads: "Did we get everything we want? No. Are there areas of our contract we need to strengthen? Yes. Will we continue to organize our workplace, empower members, and keep the fight for #EducationForAll alive? You better believe it. La lucha continúa. ☐

***Fight for women's liberation with* WORKERS WORLD**

Marxists strive not just to honor history, but to help make it — to promote major changes needed to put the workers and the oppressed first instead of last. Workers World always commemorates the socialist holiday of International Working Women's Day, March 8, with a roundup of women's protests for freedom, justice and equality the world over.

While all issues are women's issues, WW focuses in 2018 on women in the U.S. who bear the brunt of Trump's racist, sexist, bigoted, xenophobic agenda — working-class immigrant women who are being detained and deported for the "crime" of crossing borders to find work so they can provide for their families, and the "Dreamers," whose Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status is still in limbo as both parties in Congress ignore their demands.

Struggle is the only way to bring about change. The Black Lives Matter movement, started by women and transgender activists, boldly countered racism and demanded redress for centuries of oppression. Women are powering the fight for $15 an hour and a union. Two-thirds of low-wage workers are women, often women of color and mothers solely responsible for their families. Inspired by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movement, women are speaking up on the job against harassment and for respect.

If you appreciate WW's year-round coverage of struggles that advance the rights of women, it's time to join the Workers World Supporter Program and help build the newspaper.

For a donation of at least $75 a year — and much more if you're able — members receive a year's subscription to Workers World, a monthly letter about timely issues and five free subscriptions to give to friends. Write checks (either monthly or once a year) to Workers World and mail them, with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Or sign up to donate online at workers.org/donate/; it's easy to set up monthly deductions. And thank you for your help in building Workers World. ☐

The mass appeal of 'BLACK PANTHER'

By Monica Moorehead

The movie "Black Panther" has financially taken the global film industry by storm since its official release in the U.S. on Feb. 15. Directed by the dynamic, young, multitalented African-American director Ryan Coogler and featuring a predominantly Black cast, "Black Panther" has accumulated more than $1 billion globally in ticket sales from Africa to China, including more than $600 million from the U.S. box office alone as of March 19. The movie shattered box-office records for the four-day "President's Day" weekend in February.

According to comscore.com which, together with Screen Engine, conducts exit polls of film goers on a global scale, the racial composition of those attending "Black Panther" during the Feb. 16-19 holiday weekend in the U.S. was 37 percent Black, 35 percent white, 18 percent Latinx and 5 percent Asian. These are significant numbers, considering that the Black population is estimated to be around 14 percent of the general U.S. population.

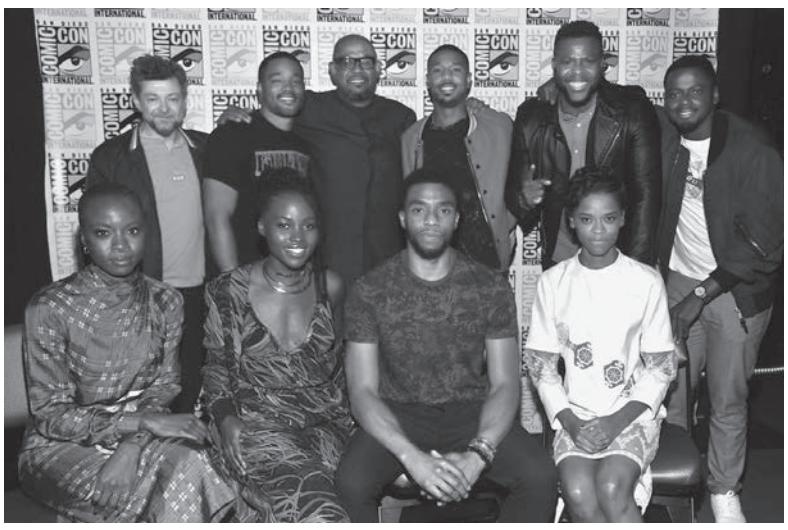
The Disney-produced, Marvel comic book-based movie had a budget of $200 million. This is the largest amount of money ever given to a Black director to make a Hollywood film.

This is only the third feature film made by Coogler, who is a native of Oakland, Calif. His first was "Fruitvale Station," which focused on the real-life murder of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old Black man, who on Jan. 1, 2009, was shot in the back by a white Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer as Grant lay facedown on the Fruitvale Station subway platform in Oakland. The murder was captured on cell phone video. Following a rebellion in Oakland, the officer was found guilty of manslaughter and served less than a year in prison.

Not only is "Black Panther" a box-office success historically. It has also been acclaimed by movie critics due to the brilliant acting and visuals.

The movie is based on a comic book character with the same name created in the mid-1960s by two white comic books creators, writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby. They were responsible for creating popular comic book characters like the Hulk, the X-Men, Spider-Man and many more. Movies based on many of these characters have made billions at the box office.

There was much speculation on whether a big-budget movie directed by a Black director with a virtually all-Black cast could become a blockbuster: Would white audiences pay money to see such a movie? "Black Panther" answered that question with a resounding yes.



Cast of 'Black Panther'

What 'Black Panther' is and isn't

Before the movie opened, many Black activists had the misconception that "Black Panther" would focus on the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist formation founded in 1966 on the principle of self-determination for Black and other oppressed peoples against racist and state repression. This is understandable.

But nothing could be further from the truth. It is highly unlikely that any studio bosses, who are still overwhelmingly white, would fork over $200 million to a Black director to bring forth a positive story featuring a national liberation organization.

"Black Panther" is very much rooted in the philosophy of Afrofuturism, a term first raised by white critic Mark Dery in his 1994 essay, "Black to the Future." Since then it's been made universally popular by Black authors like Octavia Butler and Ishmael Reed and artists Janelle Monáe, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Sun-Ra and Jimi Hendrix.

Author Ytasha Womack states that Afrofuturism is "the intersection between black culture, technology, liberation and the imagination, with some mysticism thrown in, too. It can be expressed through film; it can be expressed through art, literature and music. It's a way of bridging the future and the past and essentially helping to reimagine the experience of people of colour." (theguardian.com, July 24, 2014)

While there are themes dealing with colonialism and the legacy of slavery, the movie takes place in Wakanda, a mythical African kingdom, that has been free from white colonial rule, able to control its own resources, most notably vibranium, the source of unimaginable technological advances concentrated in Wakanda. This kingdom is run by T'Challa, played by the multitalented Chadwick Boseman, who maintains his throne by fighting off challengers. Boseman's previous portrayals include Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, singer James Brown and baseball great Jackie Robinson.

T'Challa's security team is dominated by strong, powerful African women fighters called Dora Milaje and led by Okaye, played by dynamic Zimbabwean actor Danai Gurira. Rounded out by Kenyan/Mexican actor Lupita N'yogo and Guyanese actor Letitia Wright, the characters they play have no problem pointing out T'Challa's weaknesses, despite Wakanda being a patriarchal society.

T'Challa's main protagonist is Erik "Killmonger" Stevens, played by another multitalented actor, Michael B. Jordan. This actor has appeared in all three of Coogler's feature films, including his breakout role in "Fruitvale Station," in which he played Oscar Grant. While T'Challa does not want to share the vibranium with other vulnerable nations, Killmonger, who is T'Challa's cousin, seeks to share vibranium with other African and oppressed peoples of the world in order to fight off colonial domination. Many will view him as an internationalist.

In his opening scene, Killmonger is seen in a British museum, admiring African artifacts. When a white woman curator approaches him, he asks her what country each artifact comes from. He corrects her on some answers, saying that each of the artifacts was illegally stolen, much to her chagrin. Complicating his motives, Killmonger allies himself with a racist, white, South African mercenary, played by Andy Serkis, who also wants vibranium — to make a profit.

Once again, the real issue of colonialism is brought before the masses of people in movie theaters, many of whom are unaware of how wealth was stolen from the African continent over the centuries.

Boseman stated that despite his character being portrayed as the hero, he related more to the Killmonger character, stating: "Killmonger is trying to achieve greatness ... but there's an expectation of greatness for me. I don't know if we as African Americans would accept T'Challa as our hero if he didn't go through Killmonger. Because Killmonger has been through our struggle, and I [as T'Challa] haven't." (cinemablend.com)

Boseman deemed his character as being "privileged," which is so true. Under this monarchy, he fights his challengers to hold on to his power while his "subjects" are onlookers.

Despite any political contradictions in this film, it has, with no doubt, resonated deeply with Black audiences in the U.S. and throughout the African diaspora worldwide, especially youth, due to its positive cultural portrayals of African peoples that run counter to Hollywood's historical and shameful racist movie stereotypes.

For this reason, "Black Panther" is worth seeing, along with the talented actors and the beautiful, stunning, African-themed costumes created by visionary costume designer Ruth Carter. □

San Diego march says 'Respect and trust Black Womxn'

By Gloria Verdieu
San Diego

Over 300 people showed up on March 10, in overcast, rainy weather, for the "Black Lives Matter: March for Black Women." The march was organized and led by Black women for Black women, with individuals and grassroots organizations coming to support and show solidarity.

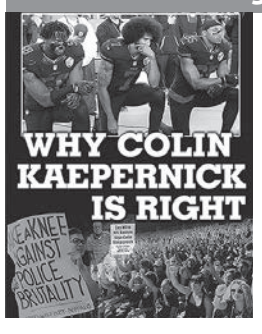
The Sept. 30, 2017, Washington, D.C., March for Black Women organized by Black Women's Blueprint, Trans Sistas of Color Project, Black Youth Project 100, and allied state anti-violence coalitions and held on the 20th anniversary of the Million Woman March, inspired the San Diego march. Local San Diego organizers held two Black Women roundtable discussions and then began plans for this historic March for Black Women, which was hosted by Black Lives Matter-San Diego and the March for Black Women organizing committee. (#M4BWSD)

Sister Karen of the Kumeyaay Nation began the opening rally with a prayer, followed by Nyisha Geedoubleu, who gave the background story on "why we march."

WW PHOTO: GLORIA VERDIEU

San Diego

Available online at:
www.workers.org/books



Articles from Workers World/ Mundo Obrero

Excerpt: 'Last October, Colin Kaepernick, the African-American former quarterback for National Football League's San Francisco 49ers, was asked after a game why he was wearing a Muhammad Ali t-shirt. He said, "To pay homage. [Ali] fought a very similar fight and was trying to do what's right for the people."'

Women, Cuba and the road to revolution

This is a slightly edited version of a talk given at a Feb. 3 forum, "Women and the Struggle for Socialism," hosted by Workers World Party in New York City.

Julie Varughese, Taryn Fivek, Teresa Gutierrez, Monica Moorehead and Cosmia Bohannan-Blumke, on Feb. 3. in New YorK City

WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

By Teresa Gutierrez

I'm not going to limit my remarks to women in Cuba but will include also women in the socialist camp. The lives of women dramatically changed with the overturning of the Soviet Union and socialism in Eastern Europe. The facts demonstrate that the lives of women there were incomparably better under socialism than under capitalism.

The New York Times has cited research that women in socialist Eastern Europe had so many more rights and privileges than women under capitalism. Women did not just enjoy generous maternity leave, guaranteed free child care, state investments in education and training, but women under socialism also enjoyed more sexual pleasure! (Aug. 12, 2017)

But that makes sense, doesn't it? Women's lives are so difficult under capitalism that when you get home, not only are you tired from work — if you're lucky enough to have a job — but the weight and worry of life under capitalism makes pleasure of any kind a distant dream. So it makes sense that women enjoyed more sexual pleasure under socialism.

When the material basis of society benefits the workers and the oppressed and not the corporations, when society is planned and organized for the masses and not for profit, life is qualitatively better.

But with the collapse of the socialist camp came the collapse in the quality of women's lives. One study notes: "A striking image of the changes after the fall of the Berlin Wall was that of women lining the highways offering sex for sale." Women in Eastern Europe began to be trafficked in record numbers directly because of the collapse of socialism. (Kligman and Limoncelli, "Trafficking Women," Social Politics, March 2005)

From bounty of rights to human bondage

This is the difference for women under capitalism, instead of under socialism. And for trans women and women of color, the horrors multiply.

Imagine the lives of women in Cuba if their revolution were to be overturned. Fortunately, we don't have to imagine this because we have every confidence in the leadership and the people of the Cuba. They will not go back to capitalism. They will fight to the last breath to defend socialism.

Here in New York we will soon have the chance to hear directly from a Cuban woman deeply involved in the building of socialism. Griselda Aguilera was seven years old when she joined the literacy campaign in the early days of the revolution. In less than one year, as people were sent out to teach and give the masses the right to read and write, Cuba raised its literacy rate to 96 percent. This, of course, greatly benefited women.

And the revolution founded the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas). The FMC helped win paid maternity leave for six whole months, with another six months of unpaid leave. That was improved in 2003, when paid maternity leave was extended to one year for both mothers and fathers. The FMC shaped Cuba's Family Code, which made it the legal obligation of men to share in housework and child rearing. Imagine that!

Perhaps what I love most about Cuban women is how, because they have grown up under socialism, they have a beautiful, dialectical-materialist way of explaining their world. When they describe actual life at home, they say: "Because they [men] do not have a wife at home to make dinner and take care of the house," life is different than what the law dictates. "Women work," Cuban women say, "but men have not learned to wash and cook. Men still don't understand what equity means."

A Cuban woman told us once, in heterosexual terms, but important nonetheless: "The woman a Cuban man wants no longer exists, and the man that a Cuban woman wants is yet to be born." Isn't that beautiful dialectics?

How important these points are when you are in the struggle! Because if we don't learn how to deal with contradictions, how to apply the struggle with nuances and delicacy, how frustrating and demoralizing it can be.

And when we are frustrated and demoralized, we cannot go forward.

This is how I see the struggle against sexual assault and misogyny in the U.S. right now. A helpful struggle, going forward, but far from what we need.

For us, whether we speak of the women's movement or the labor or anti-war movement, or even the party: Neither the movement nor the party we want is yet to be formed. Not because we don't fight or organize, but because of material conditions, because of the actual reality we live in.

Genuine socialists, communists and revolutionaries deal with the here and now and also push toward what we aspire to be, passionately but also dispassionately, objectively and as wisely as we can.

Therefore, at a forum on women and socialism, we have a trans speaker to demonstrate to the movement this is how we go forward — how we do it! Socialists understand that to win women's liberation, we must fight for trans liberation. To win women's liberation, we must fight against racism, LGBTQ oppression, ableism and all the rest.

There is no socialist revolution without women's and trans liberation. There is no women's or LGBTQ liberation without socialist revolution. □

Fighting U.S. privatization:
Teachers strike in Puerto Rico

Continued from page 1

($248,000); and Julia Keleher from Philadelphia, now secretary of education ($250,000), among others.

Attacks on the Puerto Rican people have increased since the hurricane. Whether intentional or not, the blows seem aimed at destroying a people by bewildering, overwhelming and depriving them of their ability to react.

That is why the strike is so important.

"Privatizers see students as a 'product'

The fight against educational reform involves not only privatization. The current pro-Yankee government also intends to eradicate a nation in order to make way for the "elaboration" of a "product" — in this case students — to serve the interests of U.S. foreign capital.

It establishes charter schools where priority is given to the teaching of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, ignoring the total training of students to be human beings and not robots. Inequality is stimulated by imposing educational vouchers, and foreign values are imposed through hiring — for $16.9 million — a U.S. agency, the Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, to teach "values" to the student body.

In addition, it plans to impose a U.S.-model administrative restructuring of the educational system, dividing it into seven Regional Education Offices (LEAs). Its intent is clear in the words of the legislative project: "It is important to point out that Puerto Rico is the only jurisdiction of the American Nation that has not established the LEA model at the regional level." (tinyurl.com/y7bw2ugl)

They have started a search to fill the posts of these administrators. Where? In the U.S., of course!

That is why the president of the Teachers Federation, Mercedes Martínez, calls this a "corporate reform."

The day before the strike started, Workers World-Mundo Obrero spoke with Eva Ayala, president of Educamos.

Workers World-Mundo Obrero: What is the goal of the strike?

Eva Ayala: We intend to send a strong and clear message to those who want to impose a model based on a mercantilist vision of education.

One of its effects would be to distance the right to education from the communities by creating seven regions, each of which is to be centralized. Among other implications, they announced they will close 308 additional schools (they have already closed more than 300), which would come to more than 600 schools totally eliminated over four years.

They will also eliminate over 7,500 teaching positions. Many jobs in school lunch services, secretaries and other personnel will also be eliminated. This disrupts the functioning and culture of the communities. The strike aims to move people to put pressure to stop the government's intentions.

Big interests want to control and appropriate the public funds earmarked for education. The shrinkage of government in the educational area and redistribution of wealth are part of their neoliberal policies. That is why they cut expenses and increase profits through massive layoffs, mass closure of schools, elimination of rights, privatization and an increase in the cost of education. They want to use public funds to fatten the pockets of the rich who are paying for their political campaigns.

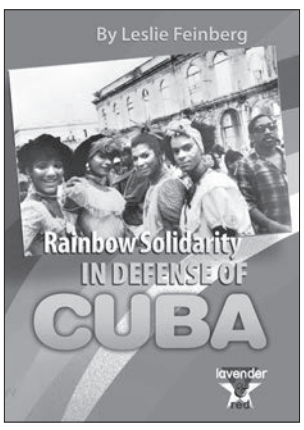
Educational vouchers use public funds to subsidize private education, which has already been declared unconstitutional. Charter schools are managed by private companies and have proved unsuccessful in other jurisdictions in the U.S. On the contrary, they discriminate against the poor, against people with different abilities and have had a history of mismanagement of funds, fraud and corruption.

WW-MO: What changes have occurred with the new department of education and Roselló's government?

EA: Under the misleading motto that "children come first," they use the most recent catastrophes to advance their positions. They are a good example of "catastrophic capitalism." After Hurricane Maria, Keleher refused to open the schools. She wanted to take advantage of that situation to eliminate schools and deprive our people of the right to education.

They intend to leave less than 800 schools functioning, increase administrative work, force teachers to work overtime without pay (which constitutes slave labor), strengthen their punitive vision of all processes related to education, eliminate the right to retirement, and cut or eliminate programs such as health, libraries, vocational training, physical education, fine arts and social sciences.

Given the increase in the cost of living and the lack of materials and equipment, they are reducing the real salaries of the teachers. Secretary Keleher implements these measures because she responds to the Fiscal Control Board. □



Rainbow Solidarity In Defense of CUBA

By Leslie Feinberg
author of *Stone Butch Blues*

Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba is an edited compilation of 25 articles from the Workers World newspaper series by Feinberg entitled ***Lavender & Red***, online at www.workers.org.

Rainbow Solidarity documents revolutionary Cuba's inspiring trajectory of progress towards liberation of sexualities, genders and sexes. This ground-breaking book reveals how the Cuban Revolution has grappled with the pre-revolutionary legacy of 450 years of persecution and exploitation of homosexuality. Rainbow Solidarity answers the demonization of the 1959 Cuban Revolution by Washington and the CIA, Wall Street and Hollywood by demonstrating that the process of solving these problems is the forward motion of the revolution.

Available at major booksellers online

WORKERS WORLD
editorial

Who gains from attacking Russia?

Right-wing British Tory Prime Minister Theresa May, her ultra-right Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and the gutter media owned mostly by multi-billionaire Rupert Murdoch have been waging a propaganda war against Russia since March 14.

The Tory regime even expelled 23 diplomats from Russia's London Embassy, claiming, without offering evidence, that Russia was responsible for a nerve-gas attack on a second-rate former Russian spy and his daughter.

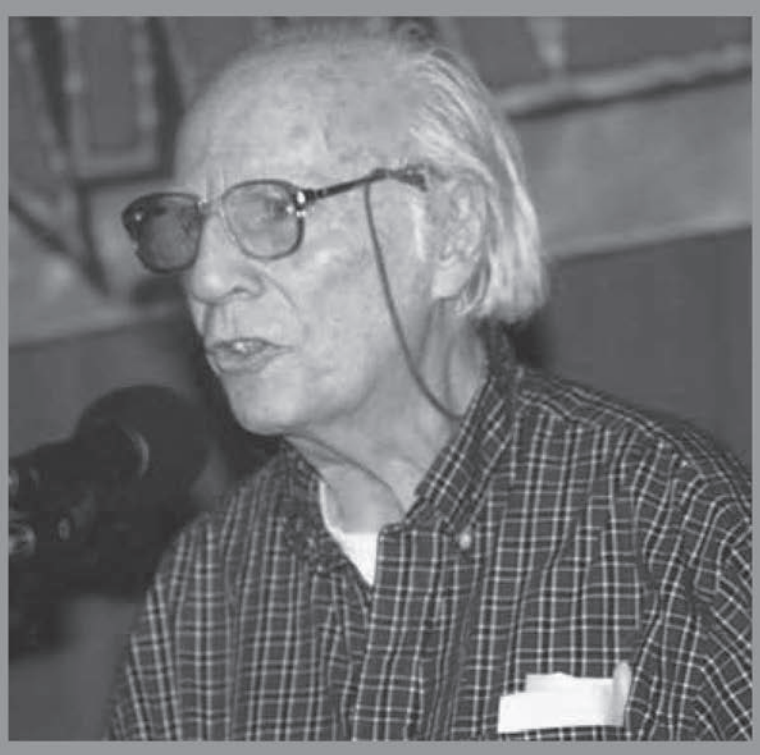
The British ruling class has 300-plus years of experience of lying to protect its colonial and imperialist interests. There is no reason to trust them. Ask, Irish, Indian and Kenyan liberation fighters against British colonialism. Ask why NATO troops have been placed in countries on Russia's border.

The attacked spy, Sergei Skripal, released in an exchange 20 years ago, has been out of service since. Besides no evidence, the British imperialist officials have no reasonable motive they can hang on the Russian government for risking murder with an illegal nerve agent. The Russian government denied involvement and expelled 23 British operatives in response.

Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn suggested that, lacking evidence and motive, it was foolhardy to rush to judgment and launch a 2018 version of the Cold War. Corbyn reminded the population that the "weapons of mass destruction" ploy used 15 years ago to justify the aggressive and utterly destructive war against Iraq was a fiction.

The British ruling class and the right wing of his own party are subjecting Corbyn to withering attack. May and Johnson have threatened additional sanctions against Russian exports.

But who would gain from increasing economic sanctions against Russia? U.S.-based fracking interests, Qatari gas exporters and even North Sea energy interests lead the pack. □



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Venezuela launches the Petro

By Gary Wilson

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela opened the pre-sale of the petro on Feb. 20. The value of each petro is equivalent to the current price of a barrel of Venezuelan oil, about 60 U.S. dollars. On March 1, Nicolás Maduro, the president of Venezuela, said that the pre-sale had brought in more than $3 billion. Public sale of the petro is scheduled for March 20.

Last December, when Maduro first announced the plan to launch the petro, he said it is meant to break the U.S.-imposed financial sanctions choking the people of Venezuela. The petro, he said, would help Venezuela "make financial transactions and overcome the financial blockade." It will give Venezuela some monetary sovereignty, he added.

Sanctions enacted over the last year by President Donald Trump's administration have blocked Venezuela's ability to move money through international banks, interfering with oil exports and even slowing the country's payments of debt obligations. The sanctions have also blocked the Venezuelan people's credit and debit cards, as Visa, Mastercard and the others are all controlled by U.S. banks.

The petro is a challenge to the U.S.-dominated world banking system and the imperialist controls used for economic and political domination of developing countries.

On the website www.elpetro.gob.ve, available in Spanish and English, the petro is called the first state-issued crypto asset, and a white paper released on the site gives more details.

What does that mean?

The petro is a digital token based on the new blockchain technology — using a digital, decentralized ledger of all transactions, called blocks, that are linked and cryptographically secured. Blockchains are secure by design and being decentralized means that no central authority (like the big banks) is needed to authorize the transaction. Blockchain technology means that the petro is removed from financial institution manipulation, including U.S.-imposed sanctions.

Bitcoin is the best known blockchain-based token, though unlike the petro, it is not an asset-based token. According to the Swiss regulatory body FINMA, tokens can have three functions: payment tokens, utility tokens or asset tokens. (tinyurl.com/ydz3f24w)

Payment tokens like bitcoin are best known and also called cryptocurrencies. Utility tokens are used to provide digital access to an application or service. Asset tokens are tied to assets, and are similar to bonds.

The petro is an asset token tied to Venezuela's oil and mineral reserves. "The Petro (PTR) will be a sovereign crypto asset backed by oil assets and issued by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on a blockchain platform," the white paper says.

Venezuela is also pursuing other ways to circumvent the U.S. sanctions war on their country. They have established trade with China, Russia and Turkey, using each of those countries' national currency, not the dollar. They are seeking similar terms of trade with other countries. For example, during a recent trip to India, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said, "We don't want to use the dollar at all," reported the Times of India on March 13. "We want to import technology, food products, and medicines by paying (Indian) Rupees and they will pay us (Venezuela) not in dollars but in Rupees." □

Militant Black union leader honored

By Rebecka Jackson
Los Angeles

The achievements of union and community organizer Chris Silvera were celebrated on March 10 when he was honored here with the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Teamsters National Black Caucus of Southern California.

Silvera, based in Long Island City, N.Y., is a leader greatly admired throughout the U.S. for his militancy and strategic actions. He is the secretary-treasurer and principal officer of Teamsters Local 808. The local represents a diverse group of workers, including railroad, building maintenance, factory and public sector. Silvera is the longest serving principal officer in the Teamsters union.

The Teamsters have a long, revolutionary history in the Black liberation struggle. TNBC was formed in 1971 to ensure that Black workers are represented in key leadership positions in the union, and to promote affirmative action and educate Black communities in and out of the union.

The effectiveness of this work is apparent, as the Teamsters have a wonderful representation of Black leadership, including women. They are a powerful lesson in how a progressive union can lead by example.

The TNBC SoCal branch is nationally recognized as a revolutionary, progressive branch, so it was fitting that it chose to honor Silvera. The event was organized by Robert Turner, a major progressive force in fighting for the rights of Black workers.

Silvera was introduced by Sen. Maxine Waters, who highlighted the importance of Silvera's victory in having International Workers' Day (May Day) proclaimed as an official holiday for Local 808 workers.

In his acceptance speech, Silvera stressed the importance of revolutionary leadership. He opened with a quotation from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

Silvera used this quote to highlight the work that SoCal TNBC does on a continual basis to make change through class struggle. He confronted Trump's attacks on the working class and stressed the importance of all workers remaining united as the working class rather than hiding behind the safety of "middle class" labels.

The Local 808 leader stated that it is the union's duty to organize and move its workers to understand that Trump is not for them, that Trump is explicitly anti-worker. He explained that the union should be used as a vehicle for advancement, not complacency, and that taking a risk to fight for rights earned by the unions is both necessary and needed.

He emphasized that union business agents must not accept tokens and trinkets for their silence and compliance, but rather be true representatives in up-

Continued on page 11

Washington wages economic war on Venezuela's people

By Taryn Fivek

The author was in Caracas, Venezuela, from March 4 through March 8, to represent the U.S.-based International Action Center as part of an international delegation.

You know you're somewhere special when the woman stamping your passport comes from the Ministry of Popular Power. Venezuela is the birthplace of Simón Bolívar — called el Libertador (the Liberator) — the man who fought the Spanish and routed them from most of South America. That is why the project that Hugo Chávez Frías embarked on in the 1990s was called the Bolivarian Revolution. The soldier who approaches you while you're waiting for the bus tells you to be careful, that this is a dangerous country. Why is it dangerous? What danger will you face here?

Caracas is on a war footing. There's no other way to put it. There are shortages. The streets are quiet at night, except for the rare gunshot that turns heads. Make no mistake. Though U.S. tanks are not in Venezuela, there is still a U.S.-led economic war going on here. And it's every decent person's duty to stand alert and fight on the side of the Bolivarian Revolution.

About 250 people from all over the planet joined together in Caracas to pay their respects to Hugo Chávez Frías on the fifth anniversary of his passing. Delegates gathered in the Teatro Teresa Carreño from March 5 to March 7 to hear a variety of economists, social scientists and Bolivarian politicians speak about the gains and challenges faced by one of the most unique and steadfast countries in the world.

According to the corporate propaganda machine, Venezuela is suffering under the dictatorship of President Nicolás Maduro, a former bus driver whom they blame for the shortages, hyperinflated currency, crime rates, instability and all other ills of the country, and accuse of fraudulent elections. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Venezuela's election process

What the capitalist news won't tell you is that the Venezuelan process is one of the most legitimate in the world. You could cut diamonds on the Venezuelan democratic process. After signing a register, a voter's finger is stained with ink to make sure duplicate votes do not occur. Each voter casts their decision on a voting machine, which can be reviewed by the voter before placing it in a box next to the machine. More than 50 percent of machines are chosen for random audit, which means that the receipt box is opened and tallies compared to the computer readout.

What results is a multiparty system run by the dominant PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela). The opposition has their space in the court of public opinion. The oligarchy — who are all right-wing — own most of the private media in Venezuela and are tolerated even though they spread lies and stoke unrest whenever the right wing loses an election. Graffiti and even billboards in Caracas demand the release of ultra-right, Harvard educated Leopoldo López. Imagine being allowed to put up such a billboard in Philadelphia for Mumia Abu-Jamal!

The PSUV's position is buttressed by the people of Venezuela themselves. The government reports having built more than three million new housing units for the poor. On first glance, they seem like the sort of apartment complexes that one might find in suburban Houston. Not exactly mansions, but many thousand times better than the housing the poor might have found themselves in before, with bare brick walls and crumbling thatched roofs.

Health care and education are free in Venezuela, with state universities offering degrees free of charge. In government housing sectors, you can often find schools and CLAP (Local Food Production and Provision Committees) centers within walking distance of one's front door. Six million Venezuelans utilize the CLAP centers each month, receiving a box of food aid that includes rice, beans, cooking oil, pasta, canned meats, powdered milk and other items.

The price of the box is subsidized, and nearly free under the illegal market's exchange rates. This is one way that the Bolivarian Revolution seeks to protect its people from sanctions, erratic exchange rates and hyperinflation.

The most destructive component of this economic warfare is the illegal market exchange rate for the Venezuelan bolívar. This is mainly caused by a website headquartered out of Miami and headed up by Gustavo Díaz. Though English-language media posit Díaz as a humble Home Depot hardware salesman who is concerned about his country of origin, his story is more complex. Díaz is actually a former military officer who took part in the 2002 U.S.-orchestrated coup against Hugo Chávez and then fled to the United States for asylum.

The job of Díaz's website is to undermine and devalue the cost of the Venezuelan bolívar, adding an extra zero onto the end of what items cost in Venezuela under the official exchange rate. The class of people who run the private-sector supply chain in Venezuela sell items using Dollar Today's rate, not the rate set by the government.

In addition to criminal hoarding and capital strikes, currency manipulation and sanctions, the U.S. had one more trick up its sleeve to attack Venezuela. By exploiting natural gas and oil reserves on U.S. territory through fracking, a terribly dangerous and environmentally destructive form of extraction, U.S. companies crashed the price of oil on world markets. This impeded the Venezuelan government's ability to adequately fund itself.

At the same time, the imperialists, led by Washington and the NATO countries, began a sort of financial blockade, refusing to lend money to Venezuela even though its government has always made it a point of pride to pay its debts on time.

The Venezuelan government has tried to counter this U.S.-backed economic warfare with a variety of creative strategies. The first is through fighting hoarding and illegal market manipulations in Venezuela itself. The CLAP centers give the government the opportunity to build a public sector supply chain system that will ultimately compete with the wealthy heads of distribution who conspire against the Bolivarian Revolution.

The second strategy is through the introduction of the petro or petromoneda, the world's first cryptocurrency backed by material goods, in this case, Venezuelan oil reserves. Unlike more widespread cryptocurrencies such as the bitcoin, there will be a limited supply of petro. This means that its weight to the bolívar is expected to remain stable, which may help stabilize the bolívar. The petro may also be useful when it comes to circumnavigating the U.S., EU and Canadian sanctions against Venezuela.

While life under sanctions and hyperinflation is difficult for many people, the many victories of the Bolivarian Revolution have earned them success after success in countrywide elections. Despite street violence by opposition forces, industrial sabotage, lockouts and capital flight, the Venezuelan people have come out time and time again in favor of Bolivarian socialism.

In the absence of this U.S.-led economic warfare, Venezuela would have progressed further. Of Venezuela's 24 million people, the three million families living in public housing, the six million who benefit from CLAP, the hundreds of thousands living in the Venezuelan communes, millions of trade unionists who benefit from some of the most advanced and progressive labor laws in the world, and the many millions more who have benefited from Bolivarian democracy keep fighting to defend their gains and pushing for more progress.

An international delegation will again be mobilized to attend and observe the presidential elections set for May 20. Until then, the Bolivarian Revolution will continue to defend itself against sanctions and economic warfare, and its supporters worldwide will continue to demand an end to the U.S.-led aggression against the people there. ☐

Militant Black union leader honored

Continued from page 10

lifting Black communities all over the world, most especially in times of need. He spoke of global Black communities suffering because of U.S. imperialism, including Haiti, Nigeria and the Sudan — all needing solidarity from the TNBC.

Silvera highlighted the importance of recognizing the transformation of the U.S. from an industrial country to a service economy, and the need for service workers to demand and earn the same wages, securities and benefits as other unionized workers.

He called on the Teamsters as a whole to be responsible as leaders in the labor movement to uplift the working class. He defined the role of the TNBS as increasing the participation of Blacks in the working-class struggle in order to manifest true equality and dignity for all workers.

Silvera was accompanied by his longtime friends Clarence Thomas and Dolores Lemon Thomas. Thomas, a union organizer and retired member of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 from the Bay Area, played a key role in the historic closings of San Francisco ports to protest South Africa's apartheid regime. Chris Silvera and Clarence Thomas were leading organizers of the landmark Million Worker March in 2004. ☐

Marielle Franco, Presente!

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

PHOTO: MARIELLE FRANCO FACEBOOK

Marielle Franco

Brazilian political activist Marielle Franco, 38, died in downtown Rio de Janeiro on March 14 in what officials have deemed a political assassination. She had just left an evening event, "Young Black Women Who Are Changing Power Structures." She was killed, along with her driver, Anderson Gomes, by assailants who shot with military precision through her car's darkened windows. The ammunition used has been traced to batches sold to the federal police. (jungewelt.de, March 16)

Franco, a Rio city councilwoman, was a fierce critic of the military occupation of the city ordered by President Michel Temer. She had just been appointed to lead a commission investigating its possible abuses. For years, she had led campaigns against police violence targeting Rio's poor Black residents. Not long before her assassination, she went to the Acari favela, a poor neighborhood, to denounce recent murders there by the notorious 41st Battalion of police, which has killed as many as 430 people in the last five years. (Vermelho.org.br, March 17)

A woman of African descent, she was born in one of the largest favelas, the Maré complex. She was also a lesbian, a mother and a member of the LGBTQ community and the left Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL). (Intercept Brasil, tinyurl.com/y92d53cb)

On March 15, thousands gathered in front of Rio's City Hall where, according to Intercept Brasil, one speaker exhorted: "She always said, 'Onwards, Black women! When the lives of Black women matter, then the world will be transformed.'" The crowds then marched and chanted: "I say no! No to military intervention! For Marielle!"

Thousands also gathered at the World Social Forum in the Brazilian city of Salvador da Bahia. In grief and furious anger at the loss of this beacon of hope, the crowd chanted over and over: "Racistas! Fascistas! Não passarão!" ["They will not pass!"] (jungewelt.de) ☐

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¡Marielle Franco Presente!

¿Por qué el paro magisterial en PR?

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

El lunes 19 de marzo se iniciará una reforzada lucha en contra de la privatización de la educación pública en Puerto Rico con el llamado a un paro magisterial cuando la Legislatura intente aprobar la privatizadora Reforma Educativa.

Este paro ha sido convocado por el Frente en Defensa de la Educación Pública que abarca varias organizaciones sindicales. Aparte de las magisteriales como UNETE, Educamos, la Federación de Maestros de PR y Educadores Puertorriqueños en Acción, convocan la Organización Nacional de Directores de Escuelas de Puerto Rico y la Organización de Directores y Administradores. A esta convocatoria se han unido otros sindicatos como la UTIER del sector energético y varias organizaciones progresistas además de madres, padres y estudiantes. El apoyo del pueblo se ha notado tanto por las manifestaciones vertidas en las noticias radiales y de tv, como en las redes sociales.

Este llamado a la acción es crucial en estos momentos en que en PR, a seis meses del paso de los huracanes Irma y María y a solo tres meses antes de que comience la temporada de huracanes, aún no ha sido resuelta la devastación causada por los ciclones. Quedan aún miles de personas sin luz, un desempleo catastrófico, grandes problemas de salud, incluyendo un aumento en los suicidios y la depresión, personas sin hogar, y miles de otros problemas que incluyen un envenenamiento de grandes proporciones por el almacenamiento de cenizas tóxicas producto de la quema de carbón, y las ineficaces acciones – rayando en criminales – de las labores de "recuperación" por parte de FEMA y del Cuerpo de Ingenieros del ejército de los EUA.

Falta de responsabilidad

Una característica del colonialismo es la falta de una verdadera capacidad de que la colonia tenga un gobierno responsable que responda a los intereses de su pueblo. Con una farsa que se repite cada cuatro años, en PR se han elegido gobernantes de la élite que aunque con programas diferentes, han continuado el sojuzgamiento del pueblo en beneficio de los grandes intereses estadounidense perpetuando así el estado de colonia y dependencia.

Ahora, hay un gobierno que intenta desesperada - y hasta cómicamente por su incongruencia - la anexión a EUA, tratando incluso de forzarla mediante el llamado Plan Tenesí. Y para ello quiere transformar al archipiélago artificialmente en lo que parecería un estado de la unión. No solo gobierna la Junta de Control Fiscal, sino que el gobierno de Ricky Roselló contrata a todas las firmas consultoras, "expertos" y agencias de EUA para que impongan sus criterios al pueblo puertorriqueño.

Además, parece un país imaginario, donde la realidad del sufrimiento y la miseria del pueblo queda totalmente ignorada – aunque se profundiza cada día más – mientras se reparten contratos millonarios a diestra y siniestra. Basta como ejemplo los sueldos extravagantes – en un país en bancarrota – de la presidenta de la Junta de Control Fiscal, la ucraniana Natalie Jaresko por $625.000; la del jefe de la nueva agencia de "Seguridad Nacional", el represor probado del FBI Héctor Pesquera por $248.000; y el de la secretaria de educación, la estadounidense oriunda de Filadelfia, Julia Keleher por $250.000.

Enormes son los ataques que han arreciado contra el pueblo boricua luego del huracán. Parece como una gran marejada de golpes con el propósito – intencional o no - de destruir a un pueblo desconcertándolo, abrumándolo y despojándole de sus capacidades de reaccionar. Es por eso la gran trascendencia del paro del 19.

Y no es solo la lucha contra la privatización delineada en esta Reforma Educativa. Es que además, esta reforma conlleva la intención del actual gobierno pro yanki: la erradicación de una nación para dar paso a la "elaboración" de un "producto" –léase estudiantes– que sirva exclusivamente a los intereses del capital extranjero estadounidense. Donde se instaura un modelo de escuelas tipo chárter llamadas Escuelas Alianzas, donde se da prioridad a la enseñanza de la Ciencia, Tecnología, Ingeniería y Matemáticas (STEM por sus siglas en inglés) ignorando la formación total del estudiantado como ser humano y no como un robot. Donde se estimula la inequidad al imponer vales educativos, y se imponen valores extranjeros mediante la contratación – por $16,9 millones - de una agencia estadounidense, The Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, para "enseñar valores" al estudiantado.

Además, se quiere imponer una restructuración administrativa del sistema educativo donde se dividiría en siete Oficinas Regionales Educativas, ("Local Education Agencies" o "LEAs" por sus siglas en inglés). El propósito de emular la estructura estadounidense queda claro en las mismas palabras del proyecto cameral que dice: "Es importante señalar que Puerto Rico es la única jurisdicción de la Nación Americana que no ha establecido el modelo LEA a nivel regional". (tinyurl.com/y7bw2ugl)

Y para llenar las plazas de estos administradores han iniciado una búsqueda. ¿Dónde? ¡En EUA por supuesto!

Es por esto que la presidenta de la FMPR Mercedes Martínez, llama a esta reforma una Reforma Corporativa.

Entrevista con Eva Ayala de Educamos

El día antes del paro, WW-MO habló con Eva Ayala, presidenta de Educamos para tener una impresión de la situación.

WW-MO: ¿Cual es el meta del paro del 19?

EA: Pretendemos con el mismo enviar un mensaje contundente y claro a quienes desde y a través del gobierno quieren imponer un modelo educativo fundamentado en una visión mercantilista de la educación.

Uno de sus efectos sería alejar el derecho a la educación de las comunidades al crear siete regiones cada una de las cuales es centralizante. Entre otras implicaciones ya anunciaron que cerrarán 308 escuelas adicionales (Ya habían cerrado más de 300), lo que sumaría sobre 600 escuelas eliminadas totalmente en los últimos cuatro años. Además eliminarán sobre 7.500 plazas docentes. Al cerrar escuelas también se eliminan muchas plazas de comedores escolares, secretariales y otro personal. Se trastoca con eso el funcionamiento y la cultura de las comunidades. El propósito del paro es mover la gente y presionar para que se detengan las intenciones gubernamentales.

WW-MO: ¿Cual piensa que es el propósito de la Reforma Educativa?

EA: Esos grandes intereses quieren controlar y apropiarse de los fondos públicos destinados a poner en práctica el derecho a la educación. Se trata del achicamiento del gobierno en el área educativa como parte de las políticas neoliberales impulsadas por ellos. Están redistribuyendo la riqueza en este renglón. Por eso recortan gastos y aumentan las ganancias a través de despidos masivos, cierre masivo de escuelas, eliminación de derechos, privatización y aumento en el costo de este servicio. Quieren utilizar los fondos públicos para engordar los bolsillos de los ricos que son quienes les costean sus campañas políticas.

WW-MO: ¿Por qué se oponen a la Reforma Educativa?

EA: Los vales educativos representan la utilización de fondos públicos para subsidiar la educación privada lo cual ya ha sido declarado inconstitucional, entre otras cosas. Las escuelas Charter son administradas por empresas privadas y las mismas no han demostrado ser exitosas en otras jurisdicciones de los Estados Unidos. Por el contrario, discriminan contra los pobres, contra la población con diversidad funcional y han tenido un historial de mal manejo de fondos, de fraude y corrupción.

WW-MO: ¿Cuales han sido los cambios de la nueva dirección del Dept. de Educación junto al gobierno de Roselló?

EA: Ellos, bajo el lema engañoso de que "los niños son primero" utilizan las más recientes catástrofes para adelantar sus posiciones. Son un buen ejemplo de lo que algunos llaman el capitalismo catastrófico. Luego de la tormenta María, la Sra Keleher, se negaba a abrir las escuelas. Quiso aprovecharse de esa circunstancia para eliminar escuelas y privar del derecho a la educación a nuestra población.

Con su plan pretenden dejar menos de 800 escuelas funcionando, aumentar el trabajo administrativo, obligar al magisterio a trabajar horas extras sin paga (lo que constituye trabajo esclavo), fortalecer su visión punitiva de todos los procesos relacionados con la educación, eliminar el derecho a retiro y otros que ya mencionamos y hacer que la escuela pública sea cada vez menos atractiva pues están recortando y eliminando programas como el de Salud, Bibliotecas, Vocacionales, Educación Física, Bellas Artes y Ciencias Sociales. Aparte de que con el aumento en el costo de la vida y la falta de materiales y equipo están reduciendo el salario real del magisterio. La Secretaria Keleher implanta esas medidas porque responde a la Junta de Control Fiscal.

WW-MO: ¿Qué piensa sobre la propuesta de "enseñanza de valores"?

EA: Eso es escandaloso, constituye un fraude de grandes proporciones. Entregarle 17 millones de dólares a una empresa ajena a nuestras comunidades para que con unas cuantas cartulinas y talleres arregle en solo cinco meses los valores y la ética de la población escolar precisamente atenta contra la ética, contra los valores y contra la moral. Gastan esos $17 millones en ese fraude mientras dicen que al cerrar 300 escuelas se ahorran $14 millones. En Puerto Rico hay personas muy preparadas en esa área y fueron obviados. Aparte de que la Secretaria de Educación y los funcionarios de gobierno son uno de los peores ejemplos para nuestra niñez y juventud. Valores tenemos las maestras y maestros que con nuestra entrega y sacrificio mantenemos la educación en pie.

WW-MO: ¿Cuales son los próximos pasos?

EA: Tenemos el paro de este lunes 19, luego una gran marcha convocada por los padres de Educación Especial para el 24 de marzo. Mientras tanto seguimos ofreciendo talleres, charlas, organizando a la gente porque estamos conscientes que nos espera una larga y dura batalla en defensa de la escuela pública y el derecho a la educación. También estamos promoviendo el trabajo solidario junto a otras organizaciones.

Como organización, EDUCAMOS estará participando y apoyando las luchas del magisterio y de nuestras comunidades escolares. Nos parece que el derecho a la educación se concretiza a través del sistema de escuelas públicas en todo el país. Por lo tanto, si queremos fortalecerlo, es imprescindible fortalecer la escuela pública ampliando la oferta académica, nombrando a tiempo los recursos humanos necesarios, ampliar y fortalecer todos los programas académicos así como Bellas Artes, Educación Física, Salud, Vocacional, Ciencias sociales, Bibliotecas y muy en particular el Programa de Educación Especial que se supone ofrezca servicios educativos a nuestra matrícula con diversidad funcional. □